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## Letter from the Editor



What does ageing mean?

Of course to each of us, ageing mean many different things, we come from different homes, spring from different circumstances and arrive at different platforms after many years at work. When we see a patient who is ageing – do we stop for a moment to think about what it means to him? What is in his psyche? Perhaps the hardest to deal with in ageing is not just the frailty of the body, but rather it is the decay of the mind and the spirit.

I have excerpted two verses from a poem below:

Ageing

“Now that I'm really old  
there seems little left to say.  
Pointless to bewail  
the decline, bodily and mental;  
undignified; boring  
not to me only but everyone,”

...

“When I saw that young girl on her blades,  
wind in her hair, sun on her face,  
like a magazine illustration  
from childhood days, racing  
her boyfriend along the pavement:  
– then I understood ageing.”

(From Ageing By Ruth Fainlight; accessed at <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/mar/13/carol-ann-duffy-poem-s-ageing> on 4 Nov 2014).

These two verses show two states of the mind. The former seems to be of a disgruntled defeated grumpy old chap; and the latter a more reflective man with some measure of wisdom, more enlightened, but who would love to still have a spot of active living.

How should we treat these two patients? Will they respond differently to our treatment plans? Should we offer them the same treatment plan? Should we do more work to understand the former state of mind? I am sure we would all want to understand the patient's state of mind better during treatment planning.

Almost as insidiously as we have aged, the Singapore population has aged. As the proportion of the elderly increases among us, the nature of practice will also change. As spending habits of patients who now become elderly change, will the types of treatment adopted change? How it will be for dental practice in Singapore as a whole, nobody can foretell. But change will surely come. How should dentists prepare for these changes? Are there additional skill-sets which are required to make practicing with elderly patients more meaningful, for them

as well as for us – the professionals? Are there new medico-legal issues that would crop up with a more elderly patient? What attitudes should we adopt when dealing with a difficult elderly patient? Indeed issues that should be considered, during a professional disciplinary inquiry, might well have to change if the patient involved was an elderly patient.

Continuing medical education programmes have thus far, as far as I have been made aware, done scanty little to address the issues of dealing with an elderly patient. Although much needed, such as special devices to clean teeth with wider inter-radicular spaces; few companies have dental supplies or materials dealing strictly with elderly patients. It is not “glamorous” to talk about the elderly. However, to this end, we are pleased to inform you that the World Congress 2015 – Dental care and oral health for healthy longevity in an aging society – is scheduled to be held over the three days of March 13 (Friday) to March 15 (Sunday), 2015. This congress will be held at the Tokyo International Forum co-hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and supported by the FDI World Dental Federation. The Japanese Dental Association has made the theme for the FDI 2015 (Tokyo) – Ageing!

Whilst much of the buildings around Singapore are gearing up for the so called “silver tsunami”, I wonder how prepared our profession is with our population ageing at such an alarming rate. To help the profession come to terms with the impending arrival of the “silver tide”, several articles have been invited from renowned authors in their fields. These deal with patient management and treatment planning issues, medico-legal issues among others. We hope these will be useful for you to “train” yourselves to be ready. Whilst it was possible to beg, on your behalf, for a few authors to write about ageing and the physiological changes as they apply to dentistry, it was not possible to find one to write about the mind of the elderly, how an older person may appreciate dental treatment needs, something that we think should be very instructive.

The editorial board is always on the look-out for ways of keeping our members informed and up-to date. If you have any suggestions please do not hesitate to write to us at [sdj@sda.com.sg](mailto:sdj@sda.com.sg).

Many Happy returns in the New Year.

Editor  
Sum Chee Peng

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